

The Resurrection of Christ

The sequence of events of Jesus' resurrection is this: (1) Jesus became alive in the grave, (2) He descended into hell, and then (3) He came victoriously out of the grave. The events are covered by the Apostles' Creed with these words: "He descended into hell, the third day He rose again from the dead." The words "the third day He rose again from the dead" refer to His coming out of the grave after He became alive and had descended into hell to proclaim His victory.

It is worth noting that Jesus did not come out of the grave after the angel rolled away the stone but before. The gospel writers leave us very much with the impression that when the stone was rolled away, Jesus was already gone (Matthew 28:1-6; Mark 16:1-6). He did not need the help of the angels in coming out of the tomb. They rolled away the stone so that the women and the disciples could go into the tomb and see that He was not there, not so that Jesus could get out.

That Jesus simply left the tomb without bothering with the stone is another indication of the change that took place in the state of exaltation. From the time of the resurrection, Jesus no longer accepted the limitations of time and space the way that He usually did during the state of humiliation. Then, He walked from place to place. He occupied space, and He limited Himself to time. But after His resurrection He does not regularly do that. So He came out of the grave without anyone seeing Him and without any need to have the stone rolled away for Him. So He appeared and disappeared in the upper room on Easter Sunday without going through the door; He did the same again the following week (John 20:19-31). So He hid His identity from the Emmaus disciples, then revealed it, then disappeared (Luke 24:13-31).

Nevertheless, He was not a ghost, not a phantom, and certainly not a hallucination. His body was real and His human nature consisting of the union of body and soul was intact. He still walked when He chose to, as with the disciples on the road to Emmaus. He let the disciples touch Him and He ate with them (Luke 24:37-43; John 20:27).

That then is the next step in His exaltation. He appeared physically for 40 days after His resurrection when and where He wished to appear. He no longer walked regularly with the disciples, lived with them, or regularly ate and drank with them. Nevertheless, His appearances were such that there could be no doubt that He was indeed alive, that He had indeed risen from the dead. The closing chapters of the four gospels, the sermons in the book of Acts, and the epistles all rejoice in the reality of Christ's resurrection from the dead. St. Paul summarises the resurrection appearances in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8. All of these appearances mentioned by Paul were appearances of the whole Christ - not just of His human nature, not just of His divine nature, but of the one Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true man in one person. For there are not two Christs, one divine and one human; there is but one Christ, the Son of God and Mary's son, true God and true man, one person. Whenever He appeared, whether to the women outside of the tomb (Matthew 28:9,10) or to the disciples in the upper room (John 20), it is the total, the whole, and the complete person who appears, now with His exalted human nature showing divine attributes that he had hidden during the state of humiliation.